

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9519

INFO AMCONSUL BELFAST

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UNCLAS DUBLIN 2019

USEEC

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, EI

SUBJECT: IRISH SENATE ELECTION

REF: DUBLIN 1648

1. AFTER FOUR DAYS OF PAINFULLY SLOW COUNTING, THE IRISH SENATORIAL ELECTION WAS FINALLY DECIDED IN THE EARLY HOURS OF AUGUST 20. THE GOVERNMENT JUST MANAGED TO STAGGER IN WITH A 31-29 MAJORITY. THE FINAL TALLY OF THE ELECTED SEATS: FIANNA FAIL 20, FINE GAEL 18, LABOR 7, INDEPENDENTS 4. WITH THE 11 SEATS TO BE APPOINTED BY THE PRIME MINISTER (TAOISEACH) LATER THIS WEEK, THE FINAL FIANNA FAIL TALLY SHOULD BE 31, UNLESS LYNCH DECIDES TO APPOINT AN INDEPENDENT OR TWO.

2. THE SMALL MAJORITY IS SOMEWHAT EMBARRASSING TO FIANNA FAIL AFTER ITS LANDSLIDE VICTORY IN THE LOWER HOUSE (DAIL). THE PARTY SPOKESMEN ARE BUSILY EXPLAINING THAT THE RESULT WAS CAUSED BY THE MANY PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT HOLDOVERS WHO CONSTITUTED THE ELECTORATE, I.E. THE OLD SENATE AND THE COUNTY COUNCILLORS (THE SENATE IS NOT POPULARLY UNCLASSIFIED

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ELECTED - SEE REFTEL). HOWEVER, THIS DOES NOTE QUITE WASH WHEN ONE LOOKS AT THE FIGURES OF PARTY AFFILIATION. APPROXIMATELY 20 PERCENT OF THE COUNCILLORS ARE INDEPENDENTS, AND THE NEW DAIL WITH ITS HEAVY FIANNA FAIL MAJORITY ALSO HAD A VOTE. THE RESULT SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN A COMBINATION OF FACTORS, PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT BEING A VERY ATTRACTIVE - AND WELL KNOWN - SLATE OF CANDIDATES

FOR FINE GAEL-LABOR. GARRET FITZGERALD, NEW FINE GAEL LEADER, WAS UNDERSTANDABLY ELATED WITH THE RESULTS. HOWEVER, THE FACT REMAINS THAT FIANNA FAIL HAS A WORKABLE, IF SOMEWHAT AWKWARD MAJORITY.

3. AS USUAL THE SENATE RACE GENERATED LITTLE ENTHUSIASM OR PUBLIC INTEREST. THE ELVIS PRESLEY STORY DROVE IT TO THE BACK PAGES. THE IRISH SENATE HAS ONLY SLIGHTLY MORE POWER THAN THE BRITISH HOUSE OF LORDS, AND LESS PRESTIGE. IT CAN DELAY BILLS BUT NOT PREVENT THEM. IT CAN, HOWEVER, ORIGINATE BILLS (EXCEPT FOR MONEY BILLS), AND ONE CAN EXPECT LIVELY ACTION ON THAT FRONT, ESPECIALLY FROM THE INDEPENDENTS.

4. THE NEW SENATE HAS A LARGER THAN USUAL QUOTA OF TALENTED AND INTERESTING PERSONS. THE THREE COALITION MINISTERS COONEY, O'BRIEN AND KEATING WHO LOST THEIR SEATS IN THE DAIL WERE ALL ELECTED. THEY WILL BE JOINED BY SUCH COLORFUL CHARACTERS AS PROFESSOR JOHN MURPHY FROM CORK, PROFESSOR BRIAN HILLERY FROM UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN AND FIERY MARY ROBINSON WHO WAS REELECTED. ANOTHER WOMAN, GEMMA HUSSEY, A PERSISTENT AND ELOQUENT SPOKESPERSON FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS, HAS ALSO BEEN ELECTED.

5. THE MOST SURPRISING DEFEAT WAS MICHAEL YEATS (FIANNA FAIL), SO THE POET AND A VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE
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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. HE WILL PROBABLY BE REAPPOINTED BY THE TAOISEACH. HIS DEFEAT ILLUSTRATES AN INTERESTING DEVELOPMENT VIS-A-VIS THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. OF IRELAND'S TEN MEMBERS (8 T.D'S AND 2 SENATORS), SIX HAVE LOST THEIR IRISH PARLIAMENT SEATS IN THIS ELECTION, AND OF THOSE REELECTED THREE OF THE FOUR JUST BARELY MADE IT. ONLY BRIAN LENIHAN MADE A GOOD SHOWING. THIS IS AN OBVIOUS LESSON TO AMBITIOUS POLITICIANS AND COULD HAVE A BAD EFFECT ON THE QUALITY OF THE IRISH DELEGATION.

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